

'I'm the Beady-Eyed Sister'

The younger of the Prentiss girls expounds on men, murder and psychedelic desks



"I knew she was our girl when I looked at her and thought: She can handcuff me, give me a ticket, arrest me, or hit me over the head with a night stick and all she will provoke is a tremendous smile."

"Our Girl" is Ann Prentiss, featured as Sergeant Candy Kane, combination lady cop and seductress of *Captain Nice*.

The speaker is the series' creator and executive producer, Buck Henry, who also says: "Ann's got her own little wonderland going. Ask her a question,

you might get a hysterical laugh."

Asked a question ("When were you born?"), the actress replied: "I told NBC it was 1942, but it was 1941. Oh-oh, my sister's not going to like that. Everybody knows Paula's two years older than me. We look exactly alike except when we stand next to each other. Our eyes are different. I'm the beady-eyed sister, she's the cow-eyed one."

Otherwise both sisters are tall—5-foot-8½—brunette and comediennes. (Paula stars in next season's sitcom

He & She.) The resemblances stop there, according to Ann: "Paula picks up all the cues, grasps the whole idea and goes on. I'm still back there going deet—deet—deet—deet."

When Ann gets nervous, she twists her head around and cracks her neck the way other people crack their knuckles. If she gets *really* nervous she develops an involuntary twitch in her left eye. Her voice has a way of changing register in mid-sentence, thin-wispy to deep-sexy. When people call her on the phone, they're likely to ask, "Did I wake you up?" or "Did I interrupt something?" Her unique propensity came in handy recently when a Hollywood wolf phoned her for a date. She turned on her 10-year-old voice: "Yes, I'll tell Ann you called. How do you spell your name?"

The Prentiss sisters, formerly the Ragusa sisters (their real name), grew up in Houston, where their father was a college professor. Now he's vice president of a bank in Tulsa. Ann followed Paula to Northwestern University, into acting and to Hollywood. When Ann's first agent tried to launch her as "Elaine Gardner," she rebelled, changed agents and adopted her sister's stage surname. Then she got the breaks. Producer Leonard Stern gave Ann her first TV role in *I'm Dickens . . . He's Fenster* and that led to one-shots in other series.

Ann lives alone in a small house in San Fernando Valley, where she moved in panic from a West Hollywood apartment. "I paint, you know, and I was painting a murder when I was there, Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia to the gods, chopping her head off with an ax. At times things would brush past me. I was sure the building was haunted. A month after I moved, the girl who took my old apartment was found there naked—strangled!"

Several years ago Ann bought an

old walnut desk-commode-bureau at a junk shop and she has transported this object back and forth across the country wherever she goes. She estimates that she has put in the equivalent of three months' full-time work painting it. The surface is now covered with about 400 human figures ranging in height from one to six inches. "I have a whole procession yet to do. I have at least three months' more work to do on it." Executive producer Henry, who made a special pilgrimage to the Valley to see this psychedelic piece of furniture, reports: "It's beautiful and insane."

Beware of wild Hollywood parties, Ann warns: "They're not a myth, they're a reality. When you find yourself down to your bitsie bitsie teenies you know it's time to split. Once I ran out so fast I left my purse. I like to be in control of myself, but it's a real challenge."

Beware of Hollywood producers, especially television producers, and one in particular: "He's an extremely rotten case. He twisted everything I said and treated me like a dummy. I finally told him, 'We're through. You stepped on my face.'"

As for ordinary non-Hollywood-producer-type males: "I like a man who knows where he's going. I want the man to lead me. I like the Wallace Beery type, virile on the outside and a softy underneath."

Like Daddy? "Yes, Daddy's where I got my violent temper. He's a Sicilian. He used to bend us over the bathroom tub and spank our bare bottoms. He'd always spank Paula first because she was 22 months older; then it was my turn. The last time he smacked me [not over a bath tub] I was 20 years old. I just love him."

How about a husband smacking you around? "If I deserved it, yes. I think a good whacking would do me a lot of good."